

There will Never be Just One Answer On diversity of artistry in eurhythmics

Zita Bucher, Barbara Dutkiewicz, Martina Jordan,
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In May 2018, eurhythmics practitioners from five European countries, who are working artistically in this and related fields, gathered for a few days to explore the following questions: How does eurhythmics influence our artistic work? What is its zeitgeist? What paths are we on? This article will give an insight into the individual approaches to our artistic work and further reflect on how eurhythmics is interweaving with it. Participants of the 2018 encounter were Zita Bucher (CH), Barbara Dutkiewicz (PL), Emilie Groz (A), Martina Jordan (SE), Alexander Riedmüller (D), Linda Schewe (D), Barbara Schultze (D), Verena Zeiner (A).

En mai 2018, des praticiens de Rythmique de cinq pays européens, qui travaillent artistiquement dans ce domaine et dans des domaines associés, se sont réunis pendant quelques jours pour explorer les questions suivantes : Comment la Rythmique influence-t-elle notre travail artistique ? Quel est l'esprit de son temps « zeitgeist » ? Dans quelles directions allons-nous ? Cet article dresse un aperçu des approches individuelles de notre travail artistique et réfléchit davantage à la façon dont la Rythmique s'y imbrique. Les participants de cette rencontre de 2018 sont Zita Bucher (Suisse), Barbara Dutkiewicz (Pologne), Emilie Groz (Autriche), Martina Jordan (Suède), Alexander Riedmüller (Allemagne), Linda Schewe (Allemagne), Barbara Schultze (Allemagne), Verena Zeiner (Autriche).



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Our gathering at Akademie der Kulturellen Bildung Remscheid¹ happened in a gap between international conferences. The starting point was our need to exchange our experience and thoughts about the artistic side of eurhythmics. Unlike the big gatherings with richly filled schedules and planned activities, this was an occasion for improvised excursions into the artistic universe of each participant.

We came to Remscheid Academy with neither prepared workshops/performances nor a final product in sight. In fact, our encounter could be regarded as an improvised performance in itself: put together eight eurhythmics practitioners, give them five days and see what happens. We started out giving each other a comprehensive insight into our artistic practice, through listening, questioning and through practical experience on the spot. Apart from our presence, this was the capital we had at our disposal – an open amount of time and space.

One of us could say “I’m fascinated by slow motion” and that made us go for a really slow walk through the village. Or rather, to be precise, the 150 metres we accomplished before the lunch bell rung. The walk then continued another day, as we went to the centre of Remscheid, where our slow walk cut right through the hectic activities of the Main Square’s Saturday Market.

Although we recognised commonality in our approaches to create, we also saw the diversity in our respective artistry and artistic expression. The following texts offer insight into the artistic projects and topics that each of us have, and in some cases, are still working on.

Cowbells

Zita Bucher, Switzerland

The sound of the cowbells has kept me busy in my latest artistic projects. That sound reminds me of my childhood – lying on the ground and smelling the fresh cut grass, closing my eyes and listening to my surroundings. I experienced a really deep sense of tranquillity and the sound of nature with all the insects, and especially, the cows eating grass accompanied by the sound of cowbells.

Even today, I am moved when attending the traditional “Alpaufzug”, a procession, where farmers bring their cattle to higher alpine elevations for the summer. It is customary that the cows are crowned with flowers and hung with huge clanging bells for the procession. During the Alpaufzug you can listen to various cowbells and therefore different keynotes and overtones. Furthermore, the different walking speeds of the animals and various sizes of the cowbells create a polyrhythm. After a while all the bells begin to melt into one big sound bubble. To me it sounds like an archaic sound or an archaic harmony.

A few years ago, I was asked to realise a long-term performance in the public sphere at the performance festival “Orte als Thema” (Places as Themes) in Lucerne (CH). I decided to contribute a collaborative piece of work with the collective “Instrumots” with whom I was working a lot back then. All members of the collective describe themselves as musicians and improvisers. However, I see myself as a eurhythmics practitioner who is expressing herself through different artistic channels: my instrument, my body, my voice, and most importantly through the connection between those channels and always through the interaction with other collaborators and through the immediate vicinity.

The area in which our long-term performance took place is very touristic: hundreds of tourists per day are rushing to the lion monument – enjoying a very short moment of admiring the procession before they head back to their buses to continue their trip. The path of the procession is a circle leading around a small block of houses. While observing the tourists walking, they appear to be a part of an unintended procession which never seems to stop: round and round and round it goes... People appear and disappear. Due to the continued stepping in and out of the procession, the sightseers cannot be distinguished nor be recognised as individuals.

Because of the “never ending stream” of tourists, I decided, that the Alpaufzug had to be a part of my performance, including the cows. The cows were prepared with beautiful flower bouquets around their bellies and of course wearing the big bells around their necks. Together with the farmer’s family we joined the “Touristic procession” for thirty minutes, just walking in circles as the tourists did, interrupting them in a very gentle way. It was astonishing how our walk slowed down the tourists. At times it even led the crowds to focus on a totally different perspective. The (archaic, polyrhythm) sound of the cowbells, strengthened by its echo from the buildings, even got close to the described sound bubble.

All different concepts we created and performed that day were an attempt to intervene in the never-ending stream of human beings - sometimes in a very gentle and subtle way, sometimes more intensely where the passing crowd was not able to overlook or avoid us. The concepts we performed depended a lot on everyone’s ability to *improvise*, to *connect* and

to *interact* within and through the environment, including the architectural surroundings and especially the people who unintentionally participated. It is a privilege for me and even more essential for my self-perception as an artist, to be part of such interdisciplinary art projects. It enables me to develop my skills but also to contribute to the projects with my abilities as a eurhythmics practitioner.

Tracking the Differences – Variants of Working on *Plastique Animée*

Barbara Dutkiewicz, Poland

Not often have I the opportunity to work with music without rush and overloaded with activities of everyday life. This is what happened here, in the well-designed and equipped large studio, where you can see the vastness of greenery and mountains through a glass wall.

Here was a special kind of contemplating of music through the movement of your body in complete peace of mind and emotions, undisturbed positive energy, silence, and infiniteness of time and space – wherein participants freely shared their thoughts and so inspired the course of the joint experience. The mutual exchange was all the more interesting as it took place among people who work with the same method, with common roots but with different ways of working developed by generations of educators working in different countries, and with different personal experiences in practicing this method.

In this extraordinary atmosphere, I focused on one chosen range... I think as eurhythmics practitioners we notice obvious differences between *plastique animée* works made in Poland and those made in other European countries. I have always wanted to understand where these differences come from. (I know where they come from in the personal style or historical sense, but I wonder about a practical level – e.g., in the way of conducting a creative process).

So, together we experienced working on *plastique animée* as a process, in the form of a workshop, begun in a very traditional way by improvising to an exemplary piece of music by B. Britten – *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge for String Orchestra op. 10*. All participants entered into the movement improvisation with readiness and great openness, moving very musically to the music. As we listened to music with simultaneous movement improvisation – the so-called active listening combined with the analysis of a piece of music – I had the impression that such activities are everyday life for the participants.

During the exchange of comments, it turned out that, *de facto*, all participants worked in the same way during their studies. But when I wanted to repeat the improvisation many times, focusing the physical activity each time on different musical levels and elements of the musical work – it turned out that they usually do not look with such detail every time while working on a piece of music.

A first question can be asked: what do the students of eurhythmics (in different countries) do on the next stage of work with the piece? Do they work with sensing space, body and music during movement improvisation to music? Additional questions regard how they improvise in the *plastique animée* process. Is it improvisation to music through the perception of music? Do they always start from their personal interior? Is it always as inner dialogue with music? Or maybe it is improvisation through delving into the music – forgetting about yourself – following only the elements of a musical work? By catching the shape of music and just music, without thinking about yourself? Or is it improvisation with a simultaneous perception through a body which senses space? Or an improvisation while imagining an image in your head and designing it during the process of that improvisation? Why do some choreographies of music relate closely to their music, but sometimes lack an original idea for individual interpretation, while others are very interesting and creative, but often do not show a relation to music?

These questions relate indirectly to various techniques of working with the body and space as well as to the ways of improvisation (like Body-Mind Centering or ways of working derived from Actors Studio etc.) – practiced in contemporary dance or theatre. As it is,

we can be inspired by them (and many more ways of improvisation) while creating a contemporary performance. But what is precious in *plastique animée* is the relationship between the individual (his/her body, space, feelings, imagination) and the music. And also, whether it's you as an individual expressing something through the music and if so, by what means? All these questions above are just a starting point for further work on understanding the role and place of *plastique animée* in the contemporary world and contemporary art.

What does the space hold?

Martina Jordan, Sweden

The soft and ergonomic, yet energetic playing of the body
 The music, the voice and the movement coming together as a whole
 The huge amount of space and time
 The power of repetition
 The possibility of meditation in motion

(notes from my first meeting with the Usul)

The body music festival was vibrating of fast, dense rhythms and advanced movement vocabulary; but what left an indelible impression was my meeting with the Usul.² There was something about these slow, yet complex rhythmic patterns, so sparse that they mainly consist of space. I was immediately captured.

I returned home where my walks turned into Usul. I stopped at spring streams to record the movements of the water with the ones of Usul, reading the rhythms aloud. I performed the Usul when muffled by wool gloves and snow. I repeated it for hours on the bridge by the river, as a meditation in motion. Eventually, I took on the experiment of adding an equally old Swedish choral to the Usul of 60 that was occupying me, seeking an interaction where the two voices might enrich each other and create a whole, bigger than its parts.

The basic Usul is a cycle measuring from 2 up to 128, of something similar to time signature. To this rhythmic skeleton, musicians add rhythmic and melodic layers, filling the pauses up.³ When using my body, the sounds of the basic rhythm are taken care of by a limited movement vocabulary and then there is – space.

Dealing with space
 I experience something like time slowing down
 or enlarging
 into a state where I am given a possibility to master every moment
 A strong feeling of presence
 An in between space and state where I am connected to myself and
 others at the same time

(notes from the Usul work process)

Since the in between space doesn't contain that much movements or sounds in the ordinary sense, little or nothing happens, but to say there is no action would be wrong. Performing the Usul in movement gives a physical way of connecting the sounding beats with each other, as if the body literally carries or holds the music through the silence of each space. This way, embodied and set in motion, the space in between beats produce moving or still images of time passing. So, what does the space hold?

2 Usuls are the rhythmic patterns Turkish music is built on, performed by bass and treble drum and with roots far back in the Ottoman Empire. I met it at the international Body Rhythm Festival in Hamburg, Germany, 2016. The workshop was given by Gokce Gurcay, Turkey.

3 It must be said that this is my limited understanding of the Usul and of Turkish music, as I have not had the opportunity to study them in Turkey.

I believe it holds an act of listening. A listening extended to the whole body, perceiving not only sounding music but the room, other bodies and voices in the room and the shifting space between them. For me, this in-depth ability to listen lies at the heart of eurhythmics. It follows me whether I perform or teach, improvise or compose, no matter what discipline or context I find myself in. The act of listening is what activates my body and my mind, and what creates a state of full presence, where I not only can perform something, but also convey it to an audience.

On a metaphorical level, the space in Usul resonates with the space where I, as a eurhythmics practitioner, have developed my artistic practice – ie. the space between music and movement, whose multifaceted interactions I constantly explore. This work develops skills to connect different artistic expressions and disciplines, as well as a diversity of pedagogical tasks, up to the point where the very body and mind of a eurhythmics practitioner can be considered a space for diversity to flourish.

On a practical level, my work process with the Usul so far includes movement visualising music and time, as well as movement in silence and the music of movement itself. When singing was brought to the process, I regarded music and movement as two independent voices interacting. Voices that, whether they move together or apart, stay connected through an act of listening.

For me, every action has its base in listening. In the end, it is the listening that carries the music through the silence and stillness of the Usul.

– In this space, what is there to do but to listen –

Words Have Power

Alexander Riedmüller, Germany

In the following paragraphs, I will describe the course of a guided and prepared improvisation for six performers that lasted approximately one hour. The woven-in statements in the following text are an attempt to capture the atmosphere of the moments described. Some were collected on a flipchart by the performers right after the improvisation.⁴ Others were rescued from notes which were taken during a feedback session with all performers after the event. I reconstructed the first scene from the notes, the second one was recorded as a video.

...

The improvisation takes place in a big octagonal room, which is completely covered with a wooden sprung floor and has large window fronts on three of its sides with views into the hilly landscape. At one spot in the room there is a TV with moving images of a long camera ride through a mountain landscape that goes on and on.

I didn't use the TV.

Next to it there is a sofa and a side desk, generating sort of a living room atmosphere as if on a stage.

Freedom, don't follow instructions.

There is also Coptic liturgic singing coming out of the loudspeakers in the room, turned on at a moderate volume.

I've never heard something in English sung like an Imam sings.

⁴ Notes written in English have been left as they were. The ones in German were translated by the author.

On one side of the room with its tall ceiling there is a big curtain that acts as an entrance to the performing space. Behind the curtain there is a door that leads into the hallway.

The horizon was very small.

On the opposite side of the curtain with the door behind it, just in front of the large windows, there is a grand piano.

Freedom thoughts: 1. Get undressed, 2. Take my time, 3. Lie down on the street embrace the floor.

We start the improvisation, getting to know the space and its sound environment, activating the muscles in our bodies, making physical, visual, and other connections based on other perceptions of the others in the room.

I can give you orders because you all agreed to me giving you orders.

After that, the improvisation enfolds and takes different directions.

...

Scene 1

While everyone is in movement, the performers are encouraged to say out loud their prejudices about eurhythmics teachers. Some of them display several stereotypical movements, known from older movies or photographs.

It was fun when we started to make fun of ourselves as eurhythmics teachers.

One person starts to hum a vocalising exercise.

Name prejudices against women!

Then other target groups of prejudices are named, and the group is asked to respond to them.

Do I want to create negative spaces or atmospheres?

Women, foreigners, homosexuals, Muslims.

Lazy. – Sick. – Weak. – Dumb.

The movement of the group gets faster, some people seem to try to escape by running in circles through the room.

I played to make the words stop.

One performer takes a seat on the piano and starts to improvise a pop song-like tune.

Having the piano made it a stereotype song.

In parallel some others start to improvise vocally.

I am afraid to speak out loud those stereotypes before myself. Me too!

As others keep on shouting out words of prejudice, some start to clap their hands loudly trying to drown them.

Clapping hands is normally for something you like.

The improvisation goes on.

...

Scene 2

Two people are lying on the floor close to a wall.

I felt sick.

On the wall on the right above them, there is a clock.

Black words are everywhere.

Between them there is another person standing with her arms up high, letting them sink very slowly to the sides.

Words did something to me.

Two others improvise movements at the centre of the room, holding their arms in a circle and hooking them in like the links of a chain.

Words have power.

They are spinning slowly around themselves.

Be careful with words.

When a person kneels on the floor close to them, they split the chain.

What happened?

One of them leaves the centre slowly, while the other one starts to move her arms like the second hand of a clock.

The atmosphere in the room was very unique.

Everything is quiet.

Be extremely inside or extremely outside.

One performer walks straight towards the door and out of the room.

Can you please repeat?

Another one moves the sofa, so it is facing the TV. She sits down staring into the TV with her back turned to the rest of the group.

...

Over the last years I have grown more and more curious to discover which ways of doing research are possible by linking movement, music, speech, and scenic performance. Creating a laboratory space with other artists, all trained in eurhythmics, that allowed an experiment like the one described here, was one personal goal for me during the encounter in Remscheid. How would they react to my proposals? How could a theme like stereotypes/prejudices be introduced in an environment like this? Of what use would this research be afterwards? How to capture it to be able to get back to it?

This work was only possible because of mutual trust in the group, because of the openness of the performers and their will to share first their bodies and professional experience as

eurhythmics practitioners, but also because of their will to share their feelings and ideas afterwards with the whole group. Spoken for myself, this experiment was the starting point for a more profound and longer lasting exploration of the grey areas that lay between the poles of art and research.

Interconnecting

Verena Zeiner, Austria

I am a pianist, composer and pedagogue.

Stylistically I am strongly influenced by Jazz and the approach to music which this diverse field implies. Improvisation or, more precisely, real-time-composition plays a main role in my music and in my teachings. As content as well as in my way to creating and teaching music.

When performing I either play totally improvised concerts or have a composed frame that I complete in real time, on the spot – connected to the moment, the setting, my fellow performers, the audience.

When teaching I pass on the skills and knowledge someone needs to be able to improvise. My lessons and workshops are either totally improvised or have a prepared frame that I complete in real time, on the spot – connected to the moment, the setting, the requirements, the participants and their needs.

Maybe that is how someone would describe the appearance of the things I do. So far so good. But there is more.

My background in eurhythmics makes me an expert on interconnection. Interconnecting starts within myself: knowing my anatomy, physiology, neurology and how my physical, mental and emotional abilities are related. Bodywork and movement as essential parts of my daily practice, enable me to quickly grasp the condition and requirements of a here and now, to see how layers are related and make their connections visible, to create and shape spontaneously – in real time, on the spot, connected to the moment, the space, the setting.

All of these are skills that I have been training for a long time, as consistently as I train my skills as a pianist.

I use the principles of eurhythmics as an approach to my artistic work. It is a transdisciplinary approach. The transdisciplinary dialogue starts within myself. It is how I compose music, how I play piano, how I work with fellow artists.

After years of practicing, I experience my multidimensional approach to making music as highly valuable and influential. It shaped my music strongly. Noticing how critics review my music, being contacted by fellow pianists who search my advice on creating their own music as well as receiving awards for my artistic work, all lead me to believe that this is not only a subjective perspective.

I don't think that there is a typical look that identifies a piece of art created by eurhythmics practitioners. Neither do I think that this is the important question. What I consider more interesting is how a piece was created. My experience as an artist and as a recipient of art is that works born out of a transdisciplinary process can rely on an integrated substance that results in a strong external impact. Usually, it means that the artists were involved in the creative process with their whole personality, having and using skills on a motoric, sensory, affective, social and cognitive level. This makes a difference, for the performing artists and subsequently for the listening spectators.

I strongly advocate diversity and variety in the appearance of works created by eurhythmics practitioners, although I'm aware that it makes things more complex from a marketing standpoint where there's a strong desire for formatted and categorisable content in order to attract an audience.

Let's serenely embrace complexity and diversity in artistry and rather create accessible interconnections within multi-layered systems than to simplify those systems.